

IN THE CLAIMS:

1. (currently amended) An imagedigital watermark information processing apparatus comprising:

an image acquisition component which acquires input image data from a printed medium in which imagedigital watermark information is embedded;

an extracting component which extracts the imagedigital watermark information from the input image data; and

an imagea digital watermark information modification component which generates new imagedigital watermark information by modifying the imagedigital watermark information when the imagedigital watermark information complies with a predetermined condition, finite copy condition stored in the digital watermark information, and generates copied image data by embedding the new imagedigital watermark information into image data obtained by removing the imagedigital watermark information from the input image data. data when the digital watermark information complies with said predetermined finite copy condition stored in the digital watermark information.

2. (currently amended) The imagedigital watermark information processing apparatus according to Claim 1, wherein:

said imagedigital watermark information contains copy control information for limiting an allowable number of times the input image data is copied; and

when determining that the copy control information contains a variable value representing permission to copy the input image data, said imagedigital watermark information modification component generates the new imagedigital watermark information by modifying the variable value and generates the copied image data.

3. (currently amended) The imagedigital watermark information processing apparatus according to Claim 2, wherein said imagedigital watermark information modification component determines that the copy control information contains the variable value representing permission to copy the input image data when the variable value is within a predetermined range.

4. (currently amended) The imagedigital watermark information processing apparatus according to Claim 2, wherein said imagedigital watermark information modification component modifies the variable value by a smaller amount with a higher level of access authorization of a user, and modifies the variable value by a larger amount with a lower level of the access authorization level of a user.

5. (currently amended) The imagedigital watermark information processing apparatus according to Claim 2, further comprising a recording component which stores the imagedigital watermark information extracted by said extracting component, wherein:

when determining that the imagedigital watermark information contains a flag value representing image data of an original file and the same imagedigital watermark information is not stored in said recording component, said imagedigital watermark information modification component generates the new imagedigital watermark information to write the generated new imagedigital watermark information into the recording component and generates the copied image data;

when determining that the imagedigital watermark information contains a flag value representing the image data of an original file and that the same imagedigital watermark information is stored in said recording component, said imagedigital watermark information modification component modifies the variable value that is contained within the imagedigital watermark information stored in said recording component, and generates the new imagedigital watermark information and the copied image data; and

when determining that the imagedigital watermark information contains a flag value not representing the image data of an original file, said imagedigital watermark information modification component does not generate the copied image data.

6. (currently amended) The imagedigital watermark information processing apparatus according to Claim 1, wherein, when determining that the imagedigital watermark information contains a flag value representing image data of an original file, said imagedigital watermark information modification component generates the new imagedigital watermark information by changing the flag value to a value not representing image data of an original file, and generates the copied image data.

7. (currently amended) The ~~imagedigital watermark~~ information processing apparatus according to Claim 1, wherein, when determining that a level of access authorization of a user is equal to or larger than a predetermined level, said ~~imagedigital watermark~~ information modification component can provide the copied image data having the same ~~imagedigital watermark~~ information as that of the input image data, without generating the new ~~imagedigital watermark~~ information.

8. (currently amended) The ~~imagedigital watermark~~ information processing apparatus according to Claim 1, wherein said ~~imagedigital watermark~~ information modification component generates the new ~~imagedigital watermark~~ information by adding personal identification information of a user to the ~~imagedigital watermark~~ information.

9. (currently amended) The ~~imagedigital watermark~~ information processing apparatus according to Claim 1, wherein said ~~imagedigital watermark~~ information modification component generates the new ~~imagedigital watermark~~ information by adding identification information of a system to the ~~imagedigital watermark~~ information, and said ~~imagedigital watermark~~ information processing apparatus is integrated in said system.

10-15. (canceled)

16. (currently amended) An ~~imageA~~ ~~digital watermark~~ information processing method comprising the steps of:

acquiring input image data from a printed medium in which ~~imagedigital watermark~~ information is embedded;

extracting the ~~imagedigital watermark~~ information from the input image data;

determining whether or not the extracted ~~imagedigital watermark~~ information complies with a predetermined condition; ~~finite copy condition stored in the digital watermark information~~; and

generating new ~~imagedigital watermark~~ information by modifying the ~~imagedigital watermark~~ information when it is determined that the ~~imagedigital watermark~~ information

complies with said predetermined condition, finite copy condition and generating copied image data by embedding the new imagedigital watermark information into image data obtained by removing the imagedigital watermark information from the input image data.data when it is determined that the digital watermark information complies with said predetermined condition, finite copy condition stored in the digital watermark information.

17. (currently amended) The imagedigital watermark information processing apparatus according to Claim 3, wherein said imagedigital watermark information modification component modifies the variable value by a smaller amount with a higher level of access authorization of a user, and modifies the variable value by a larger amount with a lower level of the access authorization level of a user.

18-19. (canceled)

20. (currently amended) The imagedigital watermark information processing apparatus according to Claim 1, wherein the new imagedigital watermark information is embedded to the printed medium as a background pattern.

21. (new) The digital watermark information processing apparatus according to Claim 1, wherein the predetermined finite copy condition is modified with the generating the copied image data to allow a finite number of copies of the image data.

22. (new) The digital watermark information processing apparatus according to Claim 16, wherein the predetermined finite copy condition is modified with the generating the copied image data to allow a finite number of copies of the image data.